

Letter of Support
Committee Bill No. 14, LCO NO. 4291
Presented by Joyce Okonuk
Lebanon First Selectman
Abandoned Cemeteries

I am Joyce Okonuk, First Selectman of the Town of Lebanon speaking in support of this Bill and request a small modification.

Ancient burial places often began as family burial places on the family farm. In the case of a small $\frac{1}{4}$ acre cemetery in Lebanon, the farm was sold in the mid 1800's and the burial grounds were retained in the family. The ownership therefore resides with 5 to 7 generations of descendants of the original owner without a legal association for Burial Ground Authority or management. Eleven family members were interred between 1820 and 1886 with no other activity until 2000.

In year 2000, a male linear descendent was interred in the cemetery using the Town's Burial Ground Authority and in 2001 his son was likewise interred. Plots were reserved for the spouses and other family members although the father's spouse was interred elsewhere. The living spouse investigated the possibility of establishing a legal Cemetery Association but was advised by her attorney that it would be far too complicated, time consuming and expensive. Her desire is to have the town take over ownership and management of the cemetery.

It should be noted here that this bill is basically the same as S.B. No. 547 which has been approved by the Joint Committee on Planning and Development. S. B. No. 547 contains a change initiated by Senator McKinney to satisfy a similar situation in his district.

The Town of Lebanon suggests that these two bills be combined and requests the following modification:

In the first sentence after "has been made", insert the following: "under the Burial Ground Authority of the original owner(s), family or association".

A combination of these two bills with the requested change will provide Lebanon and other Connecticut Towns with the tools to maintain and utilize these long abandoned cemeteries.

I respectfully request your support.